

The Redemptive Society: The Necessity of Commitment



Thrust Statement: God wants His people to believe “in” Jesus, not just about Him.

Scripture Reading: [Revelation 3:14-21](#)

INTRODUCTION

As one reflects upon his/her own commitment to the Lord Jesus, one cannot help but wonder how much commitment there is on the part of each individual who makes up the redemptive society of God. Are you dedicated to the redemptive fellowship of God? Is there loyalty on your part to the fellowship of the concerned? Is there allegiance to the weightier matters of God’s Word? Is there devotion to the teachings of God in your daily walk with Him? Is there allegiance to winning souls to Jesus? Is there faithfulness to meet with the saints weekly? Is there commitment to study the Word of God daily? What does the word commitment mean to you? Hopefully, commitment means assuming responsibility in your walk with God.

If one is responsible, then one is loyal, faithful, firm, steadfast, dependable, stable, and so on. If the kingdom of Christ on earth is to progress, one must of necessity be committed to Jesus as both Lord and God. But this commitment also involves genuine concern for the redemptive society ordained by God to operate in the ordinary society of humanity. One cannot shun the church, as many do, with impunity from God’s wrath. The church is a part of the fabric of God’s children. In the words of Lloyd-Jones: “Wherever He reigns there is His kingdom, and the Church is one of the external manifestations of it. He rules, He reigns in the Church in the hearts of His people in this spiritual sense.”^[1]

GROWTH IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY:

GOD’S FELLOWSHIP

Just a casual glance over one’s relationship with God quickly reveals that unless there is a relevant faith, that is to say, a faith that is active in spiritual activities associated

with the people of God, then faith will not survive. One cannot live his or her life in a vacuum from other believers.^[2] Not only must faith be intellectual, it must also be a self-conscious faith that is exercised within a specific group of people, namely, God's church or community of saints. In order for one to grow to maturity, one needs the spirit and fellowship of other believers. One's spiritual life cannot be maintained in isolation from God's fellowship.

Many do not see the relevance of the church in the twenty-first century. The church frequently comes under attack from those within and from those without. Yet, in spite of all its shortcomings—blemishes, divisions, and failures—the church is still the best hope for spiritual strength. Even though today's church lacks a lot in its role within society, life without the church would be much worse. Is the church a necessity in your life? Has the church lost its saltiness? Is the church a light to the world? What does the church mean to you? Do you measure the success of the church by the crowds? Do you determine the victory of the church by how powerful the preacher is in his delivery of God's Word? Do you gauge the triumph of the church by its building program(s)? It is not uncommon for believers to forsake, or abandon, the assembly because the church does not always measure up to perfection in their eyes.

What is the church? Is it the building or the people? Do you place more emphasis upon the building of brick and mortar than you do upon the redemptive society created by God through Jesus Christ our Lord? In today's society, it is not uncommon for Christians to speak of the church as the building. Are you guilty of idolatry of the church building? It is not the building that matters, but rather, it is the real vitality manifested in the lives of God's people that really counts. Just a brief reflection upon the ancient religions in Greece reveals that even though the temples survived for a long time, the real strength of their religions had departed. One still witnesses this same phenomenon in many fellowships today. Christians go through their rituals of five acts on Sunday morning, but, at the same time, one witnesses that the genuine liveliness of the Christian life has deceased. They are no longer an active redemptive society of committed ones to Jesus Christ. They are no longer evangelists for the proclamation of Jesus as God's Good News of salvation.

One could say as Paul said to the Athenians: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious" (**Acts 17:22**).^[3] Are you very religious? Are you keeping up an outward show of Christianity? Are you dead in your devotion to the things of God? With the Athenians, their religion died in spite of religious observances by its adherents in their temples. Why? One obvious reason is that it could not meet the test of social relevance and intellectual validity in the worship of their Gods. Men and women were still groaning under the burdens of sin and longing for some hitherto remedy that would be adequate to the wants of their entire nature.

On the other hand, Christianity conquered the heathen religions because of the new vitality and social relevance that stemmed from the life of Christ, along with His teachings and His death, and His resurrection from the grave. Without Christ there was/is no hope. Without Christ there was/is the sting of death. Without Christ there was/is no optimism for life beyond the grave. Through identification with Christ, one could/can say with excitement: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting" (**1 Corinthians 15:55**)? Can you say this? Has Christ made a difference in your life? If you are still groaning under the burden of sin, Jesus is the answer to all your problems.

ZEAL FOR GOD OR DULL CONFORMITY?

Are you zealous for the things of God? Are you seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness in your life? Or are you seeking first your pleasures? One of the greatest dangers facing the church today is dull conformity. In other words, the Christian church is neither cold nor hot in its zeal for the salvation of souls or for good works that will bring glory and honor to God. One can say that the church is halfhearted in its level of concern for the things of God. Lukewarmness is not something new within the fellowship of God. Jesus, in His letter to the church located in Asia Minor (Laodicea), warned the church of its indifference to the things of God:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (**Revelation 3:14-21**).

As you transfer yourself mentally back into the first century, how do you interpret this letter to Laodicea into the twenty-first century? Christians frequently fall into wishy-washy attitudes of negligence about the things of God because of the overwhelming pressures to conform to the status quo surrounding them in their walk with God. They become a part of Protestant Christianity that no longer directs the patterns of life for fruitfulness. It is not uncommon for Christians to relinquish their responsibilities and to lose their individuality in Christian service.

THE CHURCH: INSTITUTIONALISM OR ORGANISM?

Many Christians, so it seems, think that if they meet on Sunday morning for the gathering of the saints, then they have completed their duty to God for the week. Numerous Christians have forgotten they are ministers of reconciliation, not just the pulpit minister. Numerous Christians hand over their Christian duties to a select few. Creg Ogden correctly analyzes the modern day church: "The experience of worship in an institutional framework is something done to you, in front of you, or for you, but not by you."^[4] As a whole, at least for many Christians, the church has lost its sense of missions—salt and light in a decaying world.

It appears that today's church has accommodated herself to the cultural climate of the fifteenth century of priest and clergy of a select few. In other words, the church is no longer changing society, but it is being changed by the current culture of the modern

church. The church needs to move from the concept of the church as an institution to the concept of the church as an organism. Again, Ogden is on target when he writes that there is a need for revamping one's concept of the church from an organization to the church as an organism.^[5] He expresses his thoughts about the upside down view of the church with clarity. He cogently calls attention to the upside down view of the church as wreaking havoc within the Christian concept of outreach. He writes: "The ministry of the church defined from the top-down viewpoint of its official leaders as opposed to the bottom-up perspective of God's people."^[6] In other words, Ogden accurately points out that the church today is, in one sense, an institution that has been institutionalized.

According to Robert Raines, the modern church is seeking to enable people to live with resolution in a world without resolution, that is to say, purpose without purpose.^[7] Just what does he mean by "purpose without purpose"? It appears that he is saying that Christians as a whole are just spectators on Sunday mornings—that's all. The average fellowship has little sense of individual mission in the world as ministers of God. Ministry is left for just a few select individuals known as priests, reverends, clergymen, or preachers. If someone were to ask you if you are a member of a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (**1 Peter 2:9**), how would you respond? Would you say, "I am a member of the Baptist Church"? Or would you say, "I am a member of the Church of Christ"? Or would you say, "I am a member of Tom Jones' Church"? Do you really understand that you belong to the chosen people? Do you comprehend that you are a part of the royal priesthood? As a member of this "chosen people," do you grasp that you belong to a holy nation? Have you lost your sense of urgency for the salvation of men and women?

Do you really believe the words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount as He speaks about salt and light concerning His disciples? Listen once more to His penetrating words about His people and society:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:13-16**).

One must not shrink from personal witness. God wants His people to bear fruit. As one reflects upon the Sermon on the Mount, one cannot help but recall the words of Jesus to the Twelve: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (**John 15:16**). Even though these words were spoken to the Twelve, God expects every believer to bear fruit. Just as the apostles were chosen, so God has chosen those who respond to the Good News to bear fruit to His glory (**Ephesians 2:8-10**). Christians are to live lives worthy of God's calling (**4:1-3**). To some extent, it appears that the church, as a whole, has lost its sense of vocation. Christians are called to be agents of reconciliation. Paul expresses this concept in his second letter to Corinth: "And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). Even though Paul speaks of himself and his co-workers in this context, yet all Christians are to

proclaim the Gospel message.

The idea of outreach is commonly assigned to the so-called pulpit minister. Through the lens of the institution, one observes two ministries—clergy and laity. Church signs and church bulletins betray this dichotomy—“reverend,” “The Very Reverend,” “The Most Reverend,” and so on. It is not uncommon for churches to give titles to their pulpit ministers in order to set them apart from the laity, or secular members of the congregation. On the other hand, if Christians are ministers of reconciliation, then there needs to be a revamping of the concept of ministry. It is in this vein that Raines says, “We lose our individual concern in corporate irresponsibility.”^[8] Because of this upside down view of the church, many Christians do not become involved.

Within the congregation there is the “segregation of concern” for ministry. Even though there are different gifts exercised within the Christian ministry, all Christians are ministers. Every Christian is called of God to be a faithful priest (**1 Peter 2:9**). Again, do you have a sense of mission to the lost? If you are going to reach out to the lost, there must be a change in yourself. Yes, there must be a change in your ethical behavior. Are you conscious that you are a “new creation” in Christ Jesus? New life has come in and through Christ. In the traditional church, Christians are released from the bondage of sin to life in Christ without a mission. If there is to be a renewal of mission, there must be a real change in one’s concept of Christianity—involvement.

BURNING ZEAL FOR SPIRITUAL THINGS

Individuals are willing to accept Christianity, provided that it does not demand zeal for the kingdom of God and His righteousness. With many, there is a softness of one’s faith, that is to say, there is no burning zeal for spiritual things. How do you compare to the church in Laodicea? Are you hot or cold in your relationship with God? Do you feel as Jeremiah did in speaking about the things of God? He could not keep his mouth shut. Listen to the prophet: “But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot” (**Jeremiah 9:20**).

Do you feel this way? What are your religious convictions? How do you think about Christianity? Do you support the kingdom of God financially with a determined outreach to the lost? Do you provide for the work of God with your money? Do you spend more on dog food than you give to the cause of Christ? Do you spend more on fishing than you give to the cause of Christ? Do you tip the waitress more than you give to the cause of Christ? Has the Gospel of God revolutionized your way of life?

TRUE WORSHIP

Are you involved in promoting God’s kingdom? Are you a worshiper of the One true God? What is worship? What is your concept of worship? Is worship something that you just do on Sunday mornings? Or is worship your way of life twenty-four hours a day? Elton Trueblood’s words are vivid and to the point as he seeks to call attention to the true concept of worship:

The paradox of the apparent victory, yet real defeat, of the contemporary

Church is nowhere more vividly demonstrated than in the present concentration upon *attendance*. Great billboard advertisements appear by the hundreds with a single message, “Worship Together This Week.” This fact that the donors of the advertisements are undoubtedly motivated by goodwill toward the life of religion, as they understand it, does not obscure the fundamental ineptitude of their effort. Obviously, the sponsors of the advertisements look upon attendance at a religious assembly as the major religious act or the major evidence of church membership. It is no wonder that they think this, if they observe the frantic and sometimes ingenious efforts of pastors, week by week, to surpass all previous records of attendance. The promotional purpose of the local church newsletters is transparent.^[9]

It is not uncommon for Christians to identify the whole of their worship with what they do on Sunday morning during the assembling of the saints. For many, worship starts at a certain hour and ends at a certain hour. Yes, one should assemble with God’s people on Sundays. Because one is a worshiper of God, he or she meets with the saints, which is an external sign of one’s worship. When one assembles with God’s people, this activity is a part of one’s worship, not the worship. Assembling with God’s “chosen people” is a part of one’s worship, or devotion, to God. It is a part of one’s way of life. When one presents his or her body as a living sacrifice to God, one wants to meet with God’s “chosen people” on Sundays or, for that matter, during the week. Christians will adopt the habits of Jesus in His attendance at the synagogues on the Sabbath (see [Luke 4:15-16](#)).

PURPOSE OF ASSEMBLING

This concept of assembling with God’s people raises a question: Why do Christians assemble? Is it to perform a worship service? No! Christians assemble because they are already worshippers of the One true God. Since worship is the presenting of one’s body as a living sacrifice ([Romans 12:1](#)),^[10] then Christians assemble with the company of the redeemed in order to encourage one another in the faith. The traditional concept of worship—five rituals performed on Sunday morning—is not the true concept of worship as presented by Paul. One’s proper understanding of worship will go a long way in helping to eliminate many divisions within the Christian Community founded by Christ.^[11] It is not uncommon for Christians to speak of going to worship, but this concept is not really accurate. The Church is not something you go to; it is the Church, or Temple, that does the going. Christians constitute the Temple of God (see [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#)). Trueblood captures this sense when he writes:

The difference is fundamental and far-reaching. We can go to a railroad station or to a motion picture theater or to a ball game; but a church is something which demands a wholly different human relationship, the relationship of belonging. If a man is really in—really belong to—a church, he is just as much a member of it when he sits at his desk in his business house as when he sits in a pew at his meetinghouse. The point is that the relationship, if real, is continuous, regardless of time and place and performance.^[12]

Again, one must analyze his or her concept of Christianity. Is Christianity simply a matter of attendance at a performance or just entertainment? Christians gather in order to strengthen and encourage one another in their daily walk with God ([Hebrews 10:24-25](#)).

This gathering results from one's worship as a way of life. It seems that many Christians have turned Christianity into just another religion—religious rituals performed on Sunday morning to appease a wrathful God. Jesus did not come to give us another religion; He came to give us eternal life. As a result of the wrong perception of worship, one observes spiritual erosion of love within the company of the redeemed. Christians fight like cats and dogs over a so-called worship service. Divisions, as a whole, hinge on the proper concept of religion—its interpretation over dogma. Without an adequate concept of the Christian *ekklesia*, there will never be a return to the priesthood of all believers. Again, Trueblood goes right to the heart of the matter when he pens:

The crucial question today is not whether we must have a fellowship, for on that point we are reasonably clear; the crucial question concerns the *character* of the fellowship. The more we think about it the more we realize that it must be a fellowship of the committed. This is because mere belief is not enough.^[13]

COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

Christians come together simply because they are a fellowship of the committed. It is not uncommon for Christians to take the position that they do not need to belong or participate in the company of the committed. Some believers treat Sunday as a day for fishing, visiting relatives, going to the lake, and so on. What does Sunday mean to you? Is it a day that you look forward to? Is it a day with which you anticipate hearing the Word of God expounded? Is it a day in which you eagerly long to meet around the Lord's Table to remember the One who died that you might live? Do you crucify the Son of God afresh by your outward behavior? One cannot be effective in God's kingdom with anything less than commitment, but this commitment will not be effective without commitment to the company of the committed.

The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is the object of commitment. For the believer, his or her commitment is Jesus. Christians not only believe *that* He was, but they also believe *in* Him. It is the height of folly and arrogance for one to think that he or she can live in isolation from the company of the redeemed (**Hebrews 10:23-25**). Self-sufficiency is not the hallmark of a Christian. The believer is ever conscious that he or she is weak and frail and sinful. The author of Hebrews instructs the company of the committed to encourage one another:

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first (**Hebrews 3:12-14**).

What does commitment mean to you? Did you pick up on the distinction between *that* and *in*? Belief *in* Christ is different from belief *that*. Gabriel Marcel explains the distinction this way:

The verb *to believe* is commonly used in an extremely vague and fluctuating way. It can simply mean, 'I presume' or 'it seems to me'. In that context *to believe* appears as something much weaker and more uncertain than to be

convinced. But in our domain, if we are to reach a greater precision of thought, we shall have to concentrate our attention not on the fact of *believing that* but on that of *believing in*. . . . If I believe in something, it means that I place myself as the disposal of something, or again that I pledge myself fundamentally, and this pledge affects not only *what I have* but also *what I am*.^[14]

CONCLUSION

Have you placed yourself at the disposal of Jesus? Have you made a pledge of commitment? Has your promise altered your interest? Has it affected your money? Has it changed your ethical behavior? Has it revolutionized your Sunday habits? Do you know *about* Him or do you *know* Him? Is there a distinction between believing something and believing in something? Do you believe *something* about Jesus or do you believe *in* Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Is there loyalty on your part? Once more, Trueblood captures the very kernel of devotion when he writes: “To be committed is to believe *in*. Commitment, which includes belief but far transcends it, is determination of the total self to act upon conviction.”^[15] Jesus speaks frankly and forcefully to the lawyer who wanted to know what the greatest commandment in the Law is:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’^a ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^b ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (**Matthew 22:37-40**).

Every believer believes not only *that* He was, but he or she also believes *in Him* with all of his or her heart, with all of his or her soul, and with all his or her mind. One is either with Jesus or against Him, no middle road. Are you committed to Jesus? Are you committed to His redemptive society, a society known as the Church? Do you realize that Jesus purchased the redemptive community with His own blood (**Acts 20:28**)? How do you respond to the following question: What kind of a church would this church be if all the members were just like me?

^[1] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: God the Father, God the Son* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1996), 370.

^[2] For a more detailed study of Christianity versus Isolationism, see Dallas Burdette, “Christianity versus Isolationism” [ONLINE]. Available from

<http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 23 September 2003], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under CHURCH GROWTH.

^[3] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

^[4] Creg Ogden, *The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 24.

^[5] Ibid., 29-44.

^[6] Ibid., 45-46.

^[7] See Robert A. Raines, "The Loss of Mission," in his book *New Life in the Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 13-19. I am deeply indebted for his insight concerning the need for a renewal of restoration of Jesus' mission to the world. One cannot read this book without a consciousness of Elton Trueblood's book on *The Company of the Committed*. In fact, it was Trueblood who suggested and encouraged Raines to write his book on *New Life in the Church*.

^[8] Ibid., 15.

^[9] Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 18-19.

^[10] For a more detailed study of Romans 12:1, see Dallas Burdette, "Biblical Worship (Romans 12:1)" [ONLINE]. Available from <http://freedominchrist.net> [accessed 23 September 2003], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under WORSHIP.

^[11] See Ibid., for a more detained discussion of this subject of worship and division under the title, "Congregational Worship and Division."

^[12] Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 19..

^[13] Ibid., 21.

^[14] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Faith & Reality*, vol., 2 (New York: University Press of America, 1951, republished 1979), 77.

^[15] Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed*, 22.

a Deut. 6:5

b Lev. 19:18